

Welcome to this week's presentation & conversation hosted by the **Canadian Association for the Club of Rome**, a Club dedicated to intelligent debate & action on global issues.



The views and opinions expressed in this presentation are those of the speaker & do not necessarily reflect the views or positions of CACOR.

Shaping the Future with Curiosity and Care: What It Means to Be a Grokkist.

Description: In a world defined by complexity & uncertainty, we need more than specialisation—or even generalism. We need people who see the bigger picture & ask beautiful questions that open new possibilities. In this talk, Danu Poyner introduces the concept of the 'grokkist'—someone who moves through the world with curiosity & care, integrating an accumulation of diverse experiences into a cohesive whole. By insisting on curiosity & care, grokkists re-enchant the quality of our attention, navigate life's contradictions, & challenge dehumanising systems. Through this lens, Danu explores how grokkists foster environments where creative & ethical solutions can thrive, expanding our possibility space & shaping meaningful change.

Biography: Danu Poyner is the founder of Grokkist, a community that champions curiosity & care in navigating complexity. With a squiggly career spanning education, technology, & public policy, Danu has walked away from systems that didn't work & built a space for people who, like him, feel they don't belong in traditional moulds. His work focuses on re-humanising systems & facilitating personal & collective flourishing.

The presentation will be followed by a conversation, questions, & observations from the participants.

CACOR acknowledges that we all benefit from sharing the traditional territories of local Indigenous peoples (First Nations, Métis, & Inuit in Canada) and their descendants.



Website: canadiancor.com

YouTube: [Canadian Association for the Club of Rome](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC...)

2025 Jan 08 Zoom #227



SHAPING THE WORLD WITH CURIOSITY AND CARE: WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A GROKKIST

CACOR Live | Jan 2025

Danu Poyner - Founder, Grokkist | danu.poyner@grokk.ist



generalist
multi-potentialite
polymath
multi-dimensional misfit
Renaissance person
neurodivergent
professional nuisance
principled rebel
T-shaped expert
multi-passionate
cross-pollinating hummingbird
deep generalist

grokkist.

PART 1

WHY THE WORLD NEEDS GROKKISTS





“Yes, the planet got destroyed, but for a beautiful moment in time we created a lot of value for shareholders.”



If you want a description of our age, here is one.

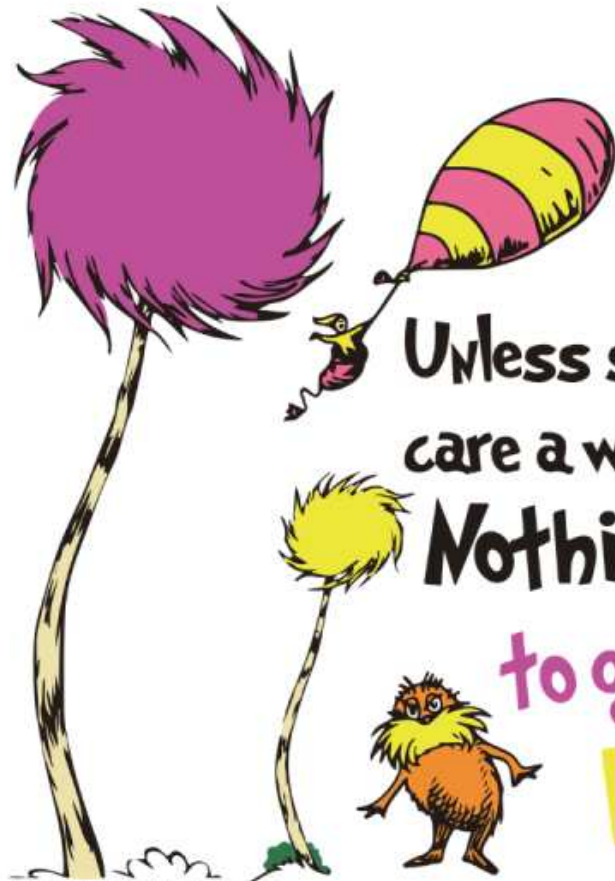
A civilisation of **means without ends**;

Rich in means beyond any other epoch,
and almost beyond human needs;

Squandering and misusing them
because it has no overruling ideal.

An ample body with a meagre soul.

- Richard Livingstone (1945)



DR SEUSS, THE LORAX

Unless someone like you
care a whole awful lot,
Nothing is going
to get better
It's not.

“

Always the beautiful answer
who asks a more beautiful question.

- E. E. Cummings

WHAT IS A BEAUTIFUL QUESTION?



**WHEN A THIRST FOR UNDERSTANDING INVITES
A LOVING ENCOUNTER WITH THE UNFAMILIAR**

KNOWLEDGE + ETHICS

CURIOSITY + CARE

WHY WE NEED BEAUTIFUL QUESTIONS

Curiosity ❌

Curiosity ✅

Care ❌

Ghouls and grey people

Dead zones of the imagination
and the banality of evil

Pulling the wings off insects

“I’m just asking questions”

Care ✅

Cancel culture

“I don’t need to ask questions”

Beautiful answers
that expand possibility space
for self and society

Grokkists

grok (v.)

- *to understand profoundly and intuitively*
- *to drink*

grokkist (n.)

- *someone who thirsts for profound understanding as a way of being*
- *a champion of curiosity and care*



grok

/grok/

verb **INFORMAL • US**

verb: **grok**; 3rd person present: **groks**; past tense: **grokked**; past participle: **grokked**; gerund or present participle: **grokking**

understand (something) intuitively or by empathy.

"corporate leaders seemed to grok this concept fairly quickly"

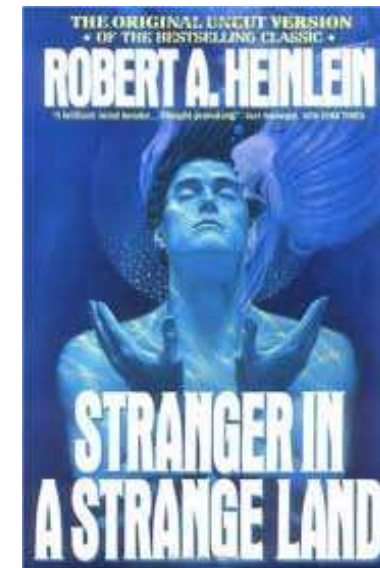
- establish a rapport.

"nestling earth couple would like to find water brothers to **grok with** in peace"

Origin

1960s: a word invented by Robert Heinlein (1907–88), American author.

Use over time for: grok



DANU'S JOURNEY – THE ORIGINS OF GROKKIST

➤ **Born at a very early age**

Thrown into the world in the outer suburbs of Brisbane, I grew up with a brain full of questions and a school system determined to squash them.

High school wasn't just boring; it was suffocating. I left twice—once for my sanity, and once because it nearly cost me my life. I made it through, but not without carrying the scars that now fuel my determination to make life less unbearable for others.



➤ **Bankruptcy builds character**

At 24, I started a design and tech teaching business that went well right up until it went bankrupt faster than you can say “cashflow”, a humbling experience that gave me a front-row education in failure and an introduction to the strange limbo of social death. One moment, people cared; the next, I was invisible—a strange mix of relief and disquiet.

Since then, I've rebuilt on a sturdier foundation, earning degrees in social science, public policy, and business administration—an education in balancing big ideals with the practical tools to make them happen.



DANU'S JOURNEY – THE ORIGINS OF GROKKIST

► Squiggly career, singular focus

Retail, teaching, research, government, tech support, publishing, policy, software sales, systems, project management, academic leadership—if there's a box, I've been in it.

The pattern? Dive in, thrive for a while, and then leave before the existential dread consumes me. My red thread? Re-humanising systems while questioning why they needed dehumanising in the first place.

► Living in the gaps

I'm a multi-dimensional misfit: I can go anywhere, but belong nowhere. Most of my career has been spent orbiting institutions that declare themselves beacons of progress while frantically boarding up the windows to keep the future out, all the while obstructing the very practices they're meant to champion.

Burnout, boot-out, bore-out—I've ticked all the exits.



DANU'S JOURNEY – THE ORIGINS OF GROKKIST

➤ **Tragic humanist, glutton for hope**

I see the world's flaws clearly, yet I also see the flickers of what it could be, and I refuse to stop chasing them. My anger at the evils of everyday thoughtlessness fuels a belief in creating spaces where curiosity, care, and possibility can thrive.



➤ **Building my own lighthouse**

I've stopped trying to fix systems that seem content to implode. Instead, I'm creating a beacon—not just for myself, but for the others who've been waiting for me as much as I've been waiting for them.

Together, we're building a place where misfits, dreamers, and defiant optimists can finally meet, unearth what's possible, and create something better than we were ever told to expect.



If I'm too interested in **public good** to be a professional **politician**...

If I'm too **truthful** to be a professional **journalist**...

If I'm too **curious** to be a professional **academic**...

If what has gone missing from the public professions is precisely the **public** part...

...Maybe I can best pursue public good in private.



“

You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete.

- Buckminster Fuller

Why do all my favourite people
**somehow still have their
curiosity intact...**

...when for most people it gets
ground down, beaten out, or burned
away by the cares of the world...

...and what else might
'still curious' people have in
common?





coddiwomple (v.)

*- to travel purposefully
towards a vague destination.*



PART 2

THE JOURNEY
FROM

GENERALIST TO
GROKKIST

WHAT'S IT LIKE TO BE A GROKKIST?





THE “SO WHAT DO YOU DO?” PROBLEM

- 5 simple words that have caused fear and heart-pounding panic for every grokkist
- We end up with squiggly careers from chasing ‘too many’ interests
- We accumulate experiences, making connections and synthesising understanding wherever we go
- Our deepest wisdom and highest value is often not visible or legible to others (or ourselves)
- If we don’t choose a box, people will assign us one

- The problem of **recognising**, **naming**, and **communicating** our expertise and value to others and to ourselves

“

I love having a word for the way I am.

- **Emily McGill**



the journey from generalist to grokkist

living as a category-of-one
recognising your reflection
reclaiming all your parts
experimenting with your gifts
finding your red thread
re-patterning and small transformations
stepping into your power



1. LIVING AS A 'CATEGORY OF ONE'

- ▶ You're not easily defined; you contain multitudes.
- ▶ You're out there finding your way, not by following a set path but by navigating life as a "category-of-one." You feel the restless pull of curiosity—a drive to explore the questions others don't ask and to connect ideas in ways only you can see. As a multidimensional explorer, you move at your own pace, guided by both curiosity and care.
- ▶ **Your uncategorisable uniqueness is likely a source of both pride and pain.**
- ▶ There's beauty in this freedom, but also moments of isolation, feeling like there's no easy way to describe what you do—or how all the pieces of who you are fit together.
- ▶ Wild confidence when you're in your zone. Wistful wonder when you see others who have figured out their path. Wild self-doubt, blame, and not-enough-ness when you feel stuck, unsettled and unseen.
- ▶ It's hard to know who your peer group is. Because you lack benchmarks or points of reference to tell you how well you're doing, you tend to swing back and forth between fear and figure-it-out-iveness.



2. RECOGNISING YOUR REFLECTION

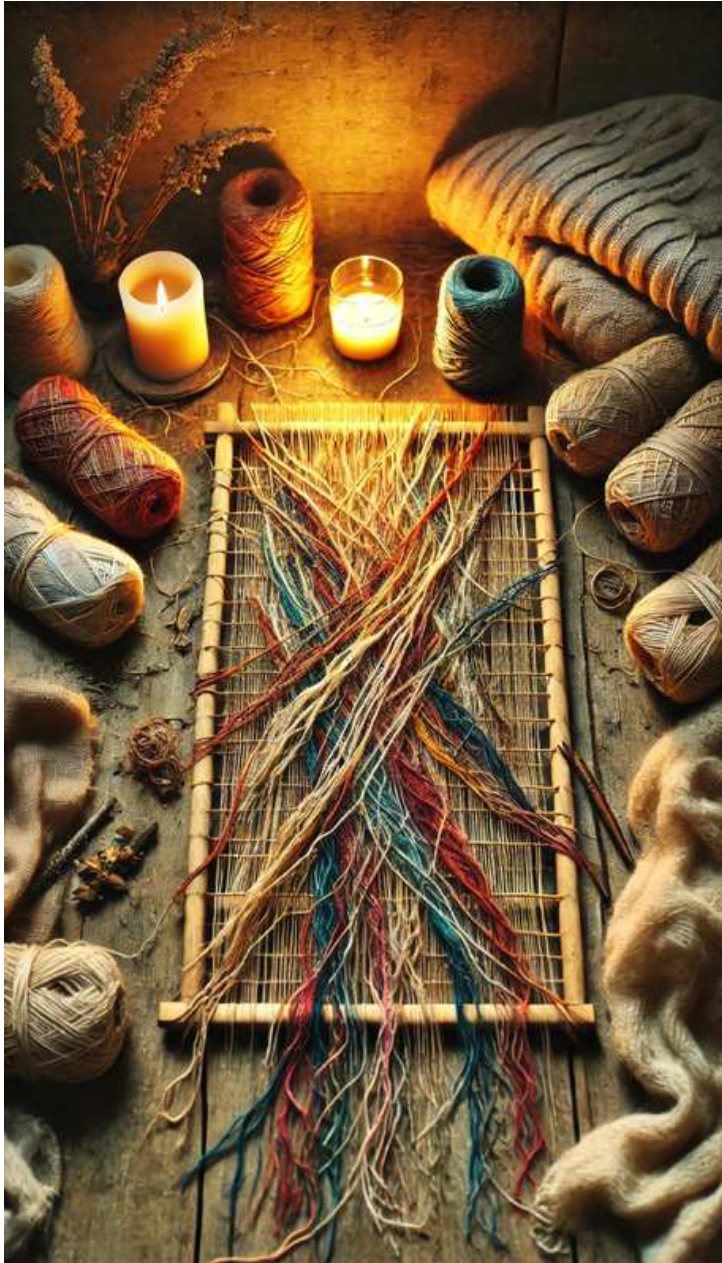
- ▶ Along the way, you meet others who understand the pull of curiosity and care that drives you. It's a mirror moment of recognition—suddenly, **you're not alone in navigating life as a "category of one."**
- ▶ When you meet other grokkists, you'll find mirrors—people who reflect back a clearer, truer image of yourself. It's a powerful moment, like seeing your full self in focus for the first time.
- ▶ You realise that others share the same restless curiosity and multidimensional depth, and in this connection, you begin to shed the feeling of being an outlier. **You belong—not by fitting in, but by being fully seen.**

“

We're all here to be mirrors
for each other so we can become
more accurate reflections of ourselves.



- The Ungoogleable Michaelangelo



3. RECLAIMING ALL YOUR PARTS

- With this recognition, you begin to embrace all the parts you may have felt pressured to hide, leave behind or compartmentalise. This is about **meeting your whole self** and realising that every part of you has value and belongs in your story.
- It's a process of repair and reintegration, gathering your hidden and disjointed fragments into something cohesive, where each piece adds depth to your being.
- You begin to realise you are free to piece yourself together and **bring all your parts into alignment**, reclaiming and reintegrating each part as it deserves. The result isn't perfection—it's depth, richness, and self-trust.

“

Embracing your inner outlier means taking those parts of self we've been encouraged to abandon and reclaiming them in a way that is valuable and shows people what they were missing.

- Brittany Cole Houston





MAD
SWEET JANE
I'M SET FREE
ECSTASY
I'M STICKING WITH YOU
POWER OF THE HEART
I WANNA KNOW
HALLOWEEN PARADE
VIDEO VIOLENCE
GUARDIAN ANGEL
MAGIC AND LOSS

ENCORES
PALE BLUE EYES
SATELLITE OF LOVE
PERFECT DAY



4. EXPERIMENTING WITH YOUR GIFTS

- ▶ As you reclaim all your parts, you begin to test the shape of your gifts by sharing them. This is where **tacit knowledge—the practical wisdom you've carried all along**, often without realizing it—starts to come into focus. You begin to test the shape of what you know, experimenting with your gifts by sharing them in conversation, collaboration, and action.
- ▶ The knowledge you've carried quietly, the things you do effortlessly, emerge as powerful tools when reflected back to you by others. Through this process, you uncover not just the what of your gifts but their deeper why. You may find that what you thought you knew isn't the whole story—or that **you've been carrying insights and skills you never thought to name**.
- ▶ As you engage with others, the wisdom you've developed through experience reveals itself, taking on new meaning and clarity. This stage is about **naming and claiming your expertise**—not in isolation, but in connection with a wider whole. It's an iterative, active process, where the gifts you offer become not only more visible but also more resonant and impactful.

5. FINDING YOUR RED THREAD



- As you look back, you begin to see **a red thread of continuity**—an invisible connection that ties together and brings coherence to all the ways you've moved through life. Your squiggly story makes sense when you trace the “why” behind each step.
- Now you start to draw that red thread forward, shaping it into **a story you can live by and invite others into**. This isn't just about understanding your own journey—it's about how your story resonates within the world around you.
- By tracing your red thread, **you find the connection between self and society**, discovering how your unique way of seeing and being can shape something larger. In this clarity, you begin to step into your place in the wider weave of the world.



6. RE-PATTERNING AND SMALL TRANSFORMATIONS

- This is a season of quiet transformation. Subtle shifts ripple through you—**small changes with profound impacts**. You may feel like a hermit crab finding a bigger shell, or a newly-emerged butterfly that pauses to rest before its first flight.
- But transformation isn't just about growth; it's also about what falls away. As you re-pattern your thoughts, habits, and responses, you may notice **the quiet release of things that no longer fit**—identities, beliefs, or ways of being you once held close. These losses can be grieved, even as they make space for what's next.
- This is a time of resting in readiness, **testing your strength**, and grounding yourself in resilience. It's about trusting the rhythm of your becoming and sensing when it's time to stretch toward something new.



7. STEPPING INTO YOUR POWER

- As the journey unfolds, the narrative you've carried begins to take shape as action. You step from being a character in that narrative to becoming its author. **In claiming authorship, you also embrace a deeper authority**—the ability to shape your life and address the world with clarity, conviction, and care.
- By listening deeply—to the world, to others, and to yourself—you move forward with intention, transforming storytelling into storydoing. Now, **you live as a custodian of your gifts**, knowing their potential to create ripples of change.
- You **carry the responsibility of your power lightly but with purpose**, writing a story that is not only yours but one that resonates with and transforms the world around you. Together, we celebrate the clarity, purpose, and fullness of who you are and who you're becoming.



PART 3

**HOW WE HELP
GROKKISTS TO FLOURISH**



Welcome to Grokkist.

A home for all those who insist on relating
to the world with **curiosity** and **care**.



**We are here to support
the builders of the new world...**

**...those rethinking the systems we rely on,
challenging outdated structures, and crafting
regenerative alternatives that honour the
interconnectedness of all life.**

We help every grokkist to

unlock
your **grok**



The Grokkist Ecosystem – A Living Experiment



Grokkist Network

Connect across disciplines, generations, and geographies in Grokkist's global community—a true speakeasy for the soul.



Grokkist Press

A home for creations that matter, where grokkists publish gifts of wisdom and creativity that inspire, challenge, and invite deeper connection.



Grokkist Academy

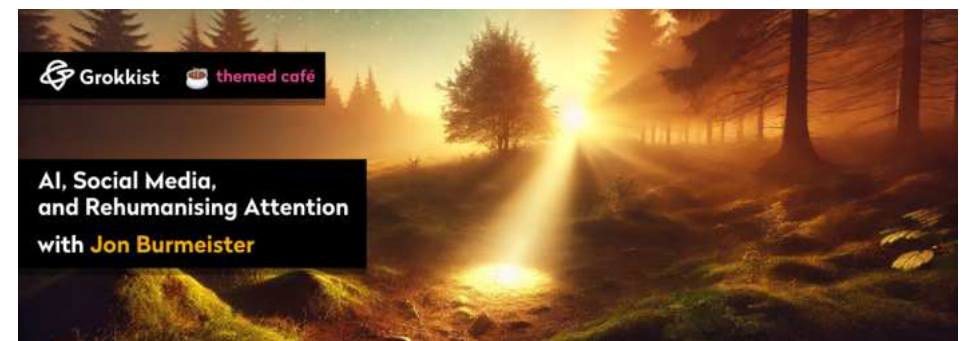
Life-changing learning experiences designed to set your soul on fire and help you level up as a grokkist.

Talent Exchange

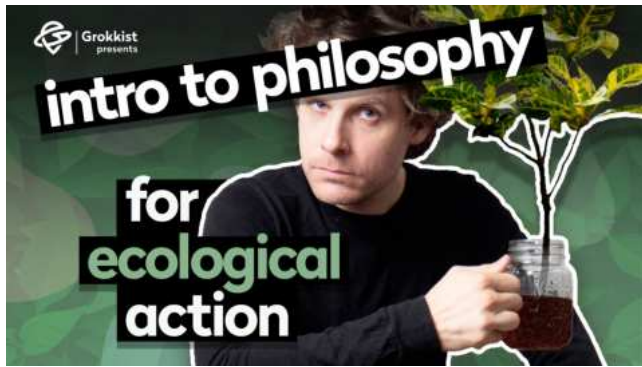
Grokkist Talent Exchange (in development)

A platform for grokkists to exchange their gifts for value—connecting with opportunities, offering their skills, and collaborating with purpose.

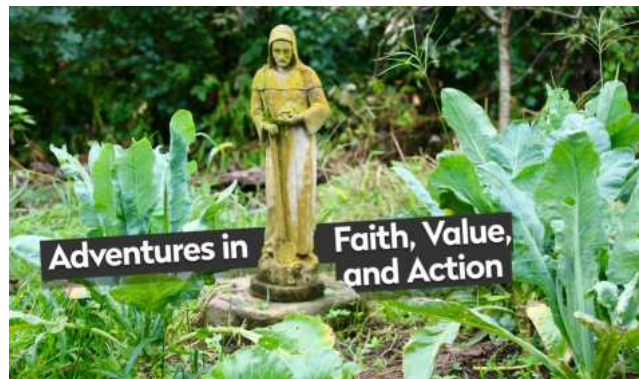
Weekly Events Program



Grokkist Academy Courses



Press Publications by Members



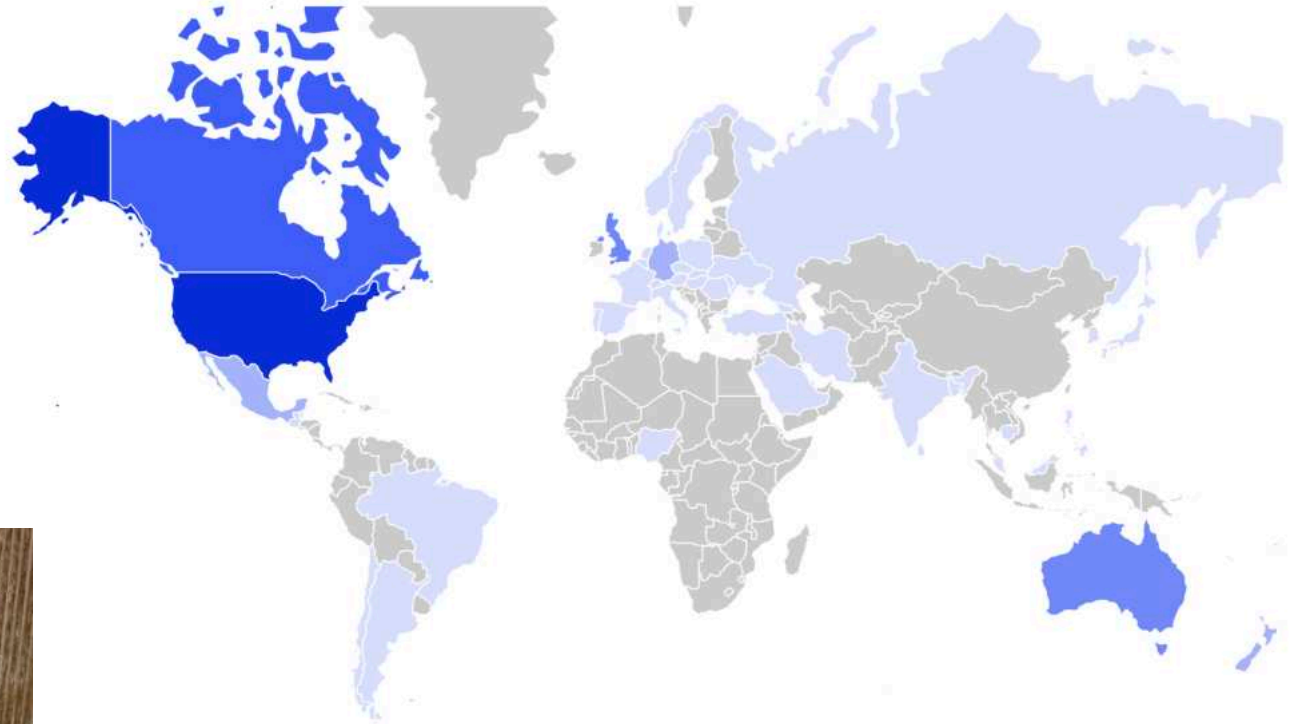
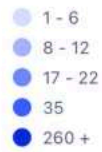
We are a **regenerative business.**

our work is grounded in:

radical accessibility
relational practices
unlocking the commons
kaitiakitanga



- **400+** Grokkist Network accounts
- **800+** Newsletter subscribers



**First in-person meetup in NYC -
October 2023**





grokk.ist | network.grokk.ist



FINAL THOUGHTS

Never in my wildest imagination did I expect to get into community-building

I'm a massive introvert who loves people but doesn't always like them...

I'm creating a community of people who resist categories, don't like joining things, and are always busy doing something else...

I'm still learning to address the world while claiming all my multi-dimensional selves

My coddiwompling journey has been many things so far... **but never boring!**



As unrepeatable categories of one,
we have a lot in common.

I believe we already have what we need
within us to create the most beautiful
possibilities to live into.

We just need to be lovingly reminded to
unforget what we already know.

Choosing to be a 'grokkist' is little more (and
nothing less) than a way of reminding
ourselves and each other that...

...the beautiful answer is most often the one
that **insists** on both curiosity and care.



THANK YOU FOR LISTENING.

ANY QUESTIONS

